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A QUAIN OLD TREATISE OF LOVE

It was written three hundred years ago; but it is probable that the subject was as well understood then as now, practically, at any rate. Indeed, neither now nor then could such a book have been of much profit to persons engaged in actual experience. "A lady asked me the other day of what use were poets," says Anatole France. "I told her they helped us to love. But she assured me that one could love very well without them."

The treatise must, of course, be authoritative: for Robert Burton had passed his whole life with great scholars and knew libraries by heart. Eminently qualified he certainly was, being "by my profession a divine and by mine inclination a physician."

Love does not fill the whole vast folio volume, only about a fourth of it, neatly and aptly dissected in its proper place under the general title of "The Anatomy of Melancholy." A vague title you say: what is melancholy? The author appreciates your difficulty—and enjoys it. "It is a kind of policy in these days," he tells you, with his delicious grave irony, "to prefix a phantastical title to a book which is to be sold." He apologizes for venturing on so uncanonical a subject when he might be engaged more decorously, perhaps in printing "a sermon at Paul's Cross, a sermon in St. Marie's Oxon, a sermon in Christ Church, or a sermon before the right honourable, right reverend, a sermon before the right worshipful, a sermon in Latin, in English, a sermon with a name, a sermon without, a sermon, a sermon, etc." But his aim is serious, his intention is eminently philanthropic: "My purpose and endeavour is, in the following discourse, to anatomize this humour of melancholy, through all his parts and species, as it is an habit, or an ordinary disease, and that philosophically, medicinally—to shew the causes, symptomes, and several cures of it, that it may be the better avoided." Immense are the benefits that he will confer upon posterity. "As that great captain, Zisca, would have a drum made of his skin when he was dead, because he thought the very noise of it would put his enemies to flight, I doubt not but that these following lines, when they shall be recited, or

hereafter read, will drive away melancholy (though I be gone), as much as Zisca's drum could terrify his foes."

And still you ask him, what is melancholy, and you are lost in the luxury of answers. It is stark, raving madness, it is quaint, fantastic folly, illusions, delusions, dreams, possessions, haunting fancies. If he had been born three hundred years later, he would have summed it all up in one word, 'nerves.' The contemporaries of Shakespeare did not talk about their nerves; but it seems that they had such things, and it cannot be denied that melancholy is a far more charming appellation. Master Stephen yearned for "a stool to be melancholy upon." Jacques could "suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs." He had a melancholy of his own, "compounded of many simples, extracted of many objects." And he, or those like him, rejoiced in "The Anatomy of Melancholy"—and bought it. "The first, second, and third edition were suddenly gone, eagerly read," says the author; and Wood tells us that in the seventeenth century it passed through eight editions by which the bookseller got an estate.

What vagueness there is in the subject the author tries to dispose of by a treatment apparently systematic, appallingly systematic. There are partitions, divisions, sections, members, subsections, numbered, related, intertwined, "mutually folded in each other's orb." There are the causes of melancholy, from God, from the devil, from parents by propagation, causes necessary, causes particular. There are the symptoms of melancholy, head melancholy, hypochondriacal, over all the body. There are the prognosticks, tending to good, like black jaundice, tending to evil, as leanness, dryness, hollow-eyed, etc. There are the cures, as varied as the disease, lawful, unlawful, dietetical, pharmaceutical, chirurgical.

And Burton does not rely wholly on his own observation or reflection in treating all these topics, not by any means. No book, scientific or philosophical, has ever been bolstered more squarely upon authority. All the classics, Greek and Latin, are dragged in for illustration, all the quaint, vast learning of the middle ages and the Renaissance is resorted to for confirmation or controversy. "'Tis Hippocrates observation, Galen's

sentence, the doom of all physicians. 'Tis Rabbi Moses aphorism, the prognosticon of Avicenna, Rhasis, Aëtius, Gordonius, Valescus, Altomarus, Sallust Salvianus, Capivaccius, Mercatus, Hercules de Saxonia, Piso, Bruel, Fuchsius, all, etc." Who would dare to differ after that? There is something touching, something pathetic about this confident reliance on scholarship. To us it is comparatively indifferent what Cardan thought concerning devils. To Burton it is serious. "These are they which Cardan thinks transform bodies and are so very cold, if they be touched. His father had one of them (as he is not ashamed to relate), an ærial devil, bound to him for twenty and eight years." Then there is Montanus and his melancholy Jew. Oh, that melancholy Jew, who came to grief by eating "tart sawces, made dishes, and salt meats, with which he was over much delighted." Surely it must ease his wanderings in the shades of Purgatory to reflect on the many sufferers who have profited by his example.

Those who think that authorities and quotations are the whole of Burton, however, are woefully mistaken, almost as much as if they should assert that Plutarch is the whole of "Anthony and Cleopatra." Our author is ready enough to mock his own method. "They will rush into all learning, divine, human authors, rake over all indexes and pamphlets for notes, write great tomes, when they are not thereby better scholars, but greater praters." If it is a humdrum method, it is at any rate an honest one. "I have wronged no authors, but given every man his own, which Hierome so much commends in Nepotian. . . . I cite and quote mine authors (which howsoever some illiterate scribblers account pedantical, as a cloke of ignorance, and opposite to their affected fine stile, I must and will use)." But he does not hesitate to reduce the whole paraphernalia to absurdity with one little, careless touch. "Look for more in Isocrates, Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, etc., and, for defect, consult with cheese-trenchers and painted cloths." The truth is, the whole book is Robert Burton, no one else; you always have him at your elbow, with his dry smile, his odd, friendly ways, and his depth of human sympathy which learning cannot obscure, nor sadness dull.

But one finds him most in his digressions, if indeed anything in the book is not a digression. He himself recognizes this wandering tendency with his usual frankness. "Which manner of digression, howsoever some dislike, as frivolous and impertinent, yet I am of Beroaldus his opinion, such digressions do mightily delight and refresh a weary reader." And elsewhere, "I have thought fit, in this following section, a little to digress (if at least it be to digress in this subject)." He makes desperate efforts to stick to the theme, reminds himself again and again that he is slipping from his formal chain of sections, members, subsections, etc., recalls his erring pen with sharp reminder, "But my melancholy spaniels quest, my game is sprung, and I must suddenly come down and follow." Yet still, still he strays, catches some pleasant hint of his quick fancy, treads some alluring, shy by-path of hidden learning, where pretty flowers of wit are to be gathered or stinging nettles of keen comment on the world. Has he occasion to trace melancholy to over-much study and the inordinate love of learning? What a delightful excuse for painting the close life of scholars, their long, long hours unrewarded, their vast pains, their solitude, their discouragements, their poverty. If he says a word of himself here, too, what harm? "I was ever like that Alexander (in Plutarch) Crassus his tutor in philosophy, who though he lived many years with rich Crassus, was even as poor when from, as when he first came to him. He never asked, the other never gave him anything; when he travelled with Crassus, he borrowed an hat of him, at his return restored it again." No discussion of the cure of melancholy would be complete without remarks on air and climate. He sighs and leaves his dusty books and steps to the window. The soft spring wind is blowing, rich with bird song. Or the stars wheel overhead in their enormous quiet. And he dreams and bids you share his reverie, till you start at his petulant reminder: "But hoo! I am now gone quite out of sight; I am almost giddy with roving about. I could have ranged farther yet; but I am an infant and not able to dive into these profundities, or sound these depths; not able to understand, much less discuss."

Without doubt in all these things the fascination lies much in

the old man's manner of speech. He himself indignantly disclaims any preoccupation of the kind, his book is "writ with as small deliberation as I do ordinarily speak, without all affectation of big words, fustian phrases, jingling terms, elegancies etc., which many so much affect." But he was a contemporary of Shakespeare, all the same, and his speech was music, uncouth often, quaint and rugged often, but large, ample, splendid with the magic of a poet's imagination. Sometimes he is grandiloquent, uses strange, antique terms, but full of color and glory. Sometimes he is simple and direct, so simple as to be harsh, even rude, but his rudeness has a graphic vigor which startles and stings like the rudeness of Donne. There is something of Saint-Simon in his brief touches. Griefs wither our bodies, "rivel them up like old apples." Grief is "the cramp and convulsion of the soul." "I say of our melancholy man, he is *the cream of human adversity*." Or he gives himself more room, shakes out the folds of his phrases, doubles his epithets, triples them, piles them up with Rabelaisian luxuriance. "In a word, the world itself is a maze, a labyrinth of errors, a desert, a wilderness, a den of thieves, cheaters, etc., full of filthy puddles, horrid rocks, precipitiums, an ocean of adversity, an heavy yoke, wherein infirmities and calamities overtake and follow one another, as the sea-waves; and if we escape Scylla, we fall foul on Charybdis; and so, in perpetual fear, labour, anguish, we run from one plague, one mischief, one burden, to another; and you may as soon separate weight from lead, heat from fire, moistness from water, brightness from the sun, as misery, discontent, care, calamity, danger, from a man." And again he seems to write for mere harmony, with subtle, tender, dreamy sweetness, which lulls you like the flow of large waters, as in the phrase that enchanted Southey: "For peregrination charms our senses with such an unspeakable and sweet variety that some count him unhappy that never travelled, a kind of prisoner, and pity his ease, that from his cradle to his old age he beholds the same still; still, still the same."

Well, in treating of all things under the sun, our author came naturally to treat of love. "Love is a species of melancholy and necessary part of this my treatise, which I may not omit."

You question the propriety a little, for a learned doctor, an aged divine, a decorous, solitary bachelor. But Beroaldus, Erasmus, Alpheratius have done it; why should not I? There must be some diversion in these grave folios. "After an harsh and unpleasant discourse of melancholy, which hath hitherto molested your patience and tired the author, give him leave, with Godefrius the lawyer and Laurentius, to recreate himself in this kind." If you please, we will proceed with a certain austerity. We will speak of the love of God first, and of angels, of high, heroical affections. We will be medical also, discuss matters dispassionately, probe hearts, bare nerves, dissolve, dissect. "The part affected in men is the liver and therefore called heroical because commonly gallants, noblemen, and the most generous spirits are possessed with it." But do not believe that it is to be all sedate, severe. We have been young ourselves. Love may be melancholy to the old and wise, "tragical in issue," but, oh, it is "sweetened in the mixture." Let us for moments forget the melancholy and paint mere love in its charm, its gaiety, its youthful grace, thoughtless, careless, "piping and singing as if it should never grow old." "We have a pretty story to this purpose in Westmonasteriensis, an old writer of ours (if you will believe it) an. Dom. 1012, at Colewiz in Saxony. On Christmas eve, a company of young men and maids, while the priest was at mass in the church, were singing catches and love songs in the churchyard. He sent to them to make less noise, but they sung on still; and if you will, you shall have the very song itself:

"A fellow rid by the greenwood side,
And fair Meswinde was his bride,
Why stand we so and do not go?

"Thus they sung; he chafed; till at length, impatient as he was, he prayed to St. Magnus, patron of the church, that they might all three sing and dance till that time twelve month, and so they did, without meat and drink, wearisomeness or giving over, till at the year's end they ceased singing and were absolved by Herebertus, archbishop of Colen." Once plunged into such dangerous waters our author is quite swept off his feet.

"Oh, pitiful young man struck blind with beauty."

But old man much more pitiful. I will reprove these charms, I will condemn them, I will show them only to show their hollowness and falsity. How will irony do, and a little cynical mocking? "I could tell you such another story of a spindle that was fired by a fair ladies looks, or fingers, some say, I know not well whether, but fired it was by report; and of a cold bath that suddenly smoaked and was very hot when naked Coelia came into it Many more such could I relate, which are to be believed with a poetical faith." But no, that haughty might of beauty (*vis superba formæ*) is so divine, delightful, that we must accept it without question. "Men are mad, stupefied many times at the first sight of beauty." We may grow old, bury ourselves in learned studies, drone out a weary chant of the vanity of life, but something in us somewhere forever responds to the story of the "child that was brought up in the wilderness, from his infancy, by an old hermite; now come to man's estate, he saw by chance two comely women wandering in the woods; he asked the old man what creatures they were, he told him fayries; after a while, talking *obiter*, the hermite demanded of him which was the pleasantest sight that ever he saw in his life; he readily replied, the two fayries he spied in the wilderness. So that without doubt there is some secret loadstone in a beautiful woman." There is indeed, a loadstone that teazes old hermits from their sanctity, and drives staid analysis into verbal antics which on any other subject would surely savor of lunacy. "Oh, that pretty tone, her divine and lovely looks, her everything lovely, sweet amiable, and pretty, pretty, pretty."

But if beauty in its pure, native grace disarms the cynic, he is much more at ease when it comes to attacking artificial allurements. All the quaint devices, the fantastic tricks of sex with sex, how easy it is to stand outside and mock them. "A painter's shop, a flowery meadow, no so gracious an aspect in Nature's storehouse as a yong maid, a noviza or Venetian bride, that looks for an husband; or a yong man that is her suitor; composed looks, composed gait, cloaths, gestures, actions, all composed; all the graces, elegancies in the world are in her face." How charming for an aged bachelor to have such an excuse for peering into the dim privacy, the languorous seclusion of scented

boudoirs. If we are to reprehend these false adornments, we must know them. How, you ask. It is no concern of ours. "Shall we be ashamed to follow the prophet Esay, a courtier himself and a great observer?" Suffice it that we know them. "Beauty is more beholding to art than nature . . . It is true that those fair sparkling eyes, white neck, coral lips, rose-coloured cheeks, etc., of themselves are potent enticers; but when a comely, artificial well-composed look, pleasing gesture, affected carriage shall be added, it must needs be more forcible than it was, when those curious needleworks, variety of colours, purest dyes, jewels, spangles, pendants, lawn, lace, tiffanies, fair and fine linen, embroideries, calamistrations, oyntments, etc., shall be added, they will make the veriest dowdy a goddess, when nature shall be furthered by art." Fashions, too, changes of fashion, the folly of it, no rhyme or reasons, the cost to patient husbands and struggling fathers, new designs grown old in a year or a month and cast aside forgotten; where do they come from, where do they go to? "Now long tails and trains and then short, up, down, high, low, thick, thin, etc.; now little or no bands, then as big as cartwheels; now loose bodies, then great fardingals and close-girt, etc. . . . For generally, as with rich furred conies, their cases are far better than their bodies, and like the bark of a cinnamon tree, which is dearer then the whole bulk, their outward accoutrements are far more precious than their inward indowments." And the arts of nature, if we may call them so, are more to be dreaded and guarded against than the devices of fashion. Those piteous appeals, those plaintive calls for sympathy, those subtle suggestions of dependence and helplessness, oh, beware of them, beware of them. "Nothing so commone to this sexe as oathes, vows, and protestations, and, as I have already said, tears, which they have at command; for they can so weep that one would think their very hearts were dissolved within them . . . As much pitty is to be taken of a woman weeping as of a goose going bare-foot."

The strange part of it all is that neither beauty nor artifice is needed. Love comes and conquers, just for itself, because it is love, and none can tell why. "It is impossible almost for two young folks, equall in years, to live together, and not be in

love." "For youth is a very combustible matter, naphthe itself, the fuell of love's fire, and most apt to kindle it." It is a madness that may sweep over whole companies of people, a possession, a frenzy, as when the "Andromeda" of Euripides was performed at Abdera. "The spectators were so much moved with the object and those pathological love-speeches of Perseus, amongst the rest, *O Cupid, prince of gods and men, etc.*, that every man, almost, a good while after, spake pure iambicks and raved still on Perseus' speech, *O Cupid, prince of gods and men.* As car-men, boyes and prentises, when a new song is published with us, go singing that new tune still in the streets, they continually acted that tragical part of Perseus, and in every man's mouth was *O Cupid*; in every street, *O Cupid*; in every house almost, *O Cupid, prince of gods and men.*" Nay, beauty is not only not required, but passion will even put up with the lack of it. Let but some accident fix the lover's fancy, some freak of chance, some coincidence of time, proximity, or habit, and all judgment is gone, all clear insight, all sense of what is truly admirable in face or character. In depicting such infatuation, love's absolute and total blindness, Burton reaches the climax of Elizabethan hideous vigor. Neither Flaubert nor Zola ever described the horrible with such naked atrocity. Keats could quote the passage with artist's relish in a private letter. I can only introduce a few of the most tolerable bits of it here. "Every lover admires his mistress, though she be very deformed of herself, ill-favored, wrinkled, pimpled, pale, red, yellow, tan'd, tallow-faced, have a swol'n juggler's platter face, or a thin, lean, chitty face, clouds in her face, . . . a mere changeling, a very monster, an aufe imperfect, an harsh voyce, incondite gesture, a vast virago, . . . a dowdy, a slut, a scold, base, beggarly, rude, foolish, untaught; if he love her once, he admires her for all this, he takes no notice of any such errours, or imperfections of body or mind."

Let them go to it, then; since the wisdom of staid age will avail nothing. Let them revel it out in their youth. Let them give gifts. "As Jupiter corrupted Danaë with a golden showere, and Liber Ariadne with a golden crown (which was afterward translated into the heaven and there forever shines), they will

rain chickens, florins, angels, all manner of coins and stamps in her lap." Let them waste royally, or, which is better for the peace of the world, let them wish to waste. "Better a metropolitan city were sackt, a royall army overcome, an invincible armado sunk, and twenty thouasnd kings should perish, then her little finger ake." Let them kiss. And here the philosopher surely remembers the Rosalind of the great dramatist, his contemporary, whom he quotes by name elsewhere. "First a word, and then a kiss; then some other complement, and then a kiss; then an idle question, then a kiss; and when he hath pumped his wit dry, can say no more, kissing and colling are never out of season." An ecstasy, a seventh heaven, an Elysium. Why should we quarrel with it, or disturb it? No luxury of gratified ambition, no splendor of achievement after long and patient toil, brings quite the felicity of this love madness, in its first blossom, its new hope, its purple glory of elusive bliss. "He can do nothing, think of nothing but her; desire hath no rest, she is his cynosure, Hesperus, and Vesper, his morning and evening star, his goddess, his mistress, his life, his soul, his everything . . . His Laura, his Victorina, his Columbina, Flavia, Flaminia, Coelia, Delia, or Isabella (call her how you will); his soul is sowced, imparadised, imprisoned in his lady."

Only there is the other side. Age comes, and disgust, and satiety, the consciousness of years and powers wasted, of opportunity neglected, all for what? And if even all lovers were fortunate. One in a thousand, perhaps, no more. You dream her a divinity, you wake to find her a devil, or worse, a doll, a puppet, an empty creature, who thinks of nothing but her clothes and her whims and how she can torment you. This, if you win her. But how likely is it that you will? A dozen others are before you, and she parlies and jests and trifles with them all. "These doubts, anxieties, suspitions, are the least part of their torments; they break, many times, from passions to actions, speak fair and flatter; now most obsequious and willing, by and by they are averse; wrangle, fight, swear, quarrel, laugh, weep; and he that doth not so by fits, Lucian holds, is not thoroughly touched with this loadstone of love.

Love to many is bitterness itself." And again, "Shall I say most part of a lover's life is full of agony, anxiety, fear and grief, complaint, sighs, suspicions, and cares (high ho, my heart is wo), full of silence and irksome solitariness?" Or let us put it dramatically, since we happen to be a contemporary of the greatest drama in the world. "By and by, when this young gallant was crossed in his wench, he laments, and cries, and roars downright. I am undone, the virgin's gone, and I am gone; she's gone, and what shall I do? Where shall I seek her, where shall I find her, whom shall I ask? What way, what course shall I take? What will become of me?"

Then there is jealousy, such a vital part, such a constant element of this love madness or melancholy that we must give it treatment by itself, with all the apparatus of special members, subsections, etc., its causes, its symptoms, its prognosticks, and the rest. What a horror! When this passion takes full hold of a man, it makes a brute of him, a fiend, worse even, perhaps, it makes a silly child of him. "He will sometimes sigh, weep, sob for anger, swear and bely, slander any man, curse, threaten, braule, scold, fight; and sometimes again flatter and speak faire, aske forgiveness, kisse and coll, condemn his rashness and folly, vow, protest, and swear he will never do so again; and then oftsoons, impatient as he is, rave, roar, and lay about him like a mad man, thump her sides, drag her about, perchance drive her out of doors."

Love and all its train of evils being such, who can blame me to attempt to cure it? Who will not praise me rather, commend me as a benefactor, sage friend, ardent helper of humanity? Though, to tell the truth, those who need me will not come to me, those who are ill of this disease do not seek the physician, and doubtless the "*Ars Amatoria*" finds a thousand readers for one who turns to the "*Remedium Amoris*." Cures? They are, alas, not so abundant as the symptoms. They are old, too, often tried, sometimes efficient, failing oftener hopelessly. There is no new nostrum, no sure specific, no warranted panacea, to heal those love wounds and send the patient whole and sound about his business. Absence? You might try absence. "The best, readiest, surest way, and which all approve, is to send them

several wayes." But it works contrary at least as often. To point out that she is flawed thus and so, has this feature awry, lacks this grace, this charm, this touch of fine perfection? Or that her beauty, be it never so enchanting, will fade and fall from her, like the splendor of noontide or summer's glory? To point out that she has faults of soul as well as of person, is vain, selfish, wasteful, niggardly of kindness, lavish of love? All these you may essay, but I doubt greatly whether they profit you. This madness, this lunacy, this frenzy is hardly to be touched by quiet reason. Also, you may try magic, if you like. I do not advise it, but some things have been done, incontestably been done. "Sckenkius hath some examples of such as have been so magically caused and magically cured; and by witchcraft, so saith Baptista Codronchus."

But without doubt, "the last and best cure of love-melancholy is to let them have their desire." We have said many harsh things of love, many of marriage; ill-assorted, it is the worst of evils, a plague, a rack, continual, intolerable torment. But let us sing a palinode at last. Those who are well-mated, happily, divinely fitted to one another, how fortunate they are. Nothing in the world is to be compared to a good wife. "She is still the same in sickness and in health; his eye, his hand, his bosome friend, his partner at all times, his other self, not to be separated by any calamity, but ready to share all sorrow, discontents; and, as the Indian women do, live and dye with him, nay more, to dye presently for him." And to sum the whole, let us paint a poet's picture of married life in its perfect bliss, its full, entire, and rhythmic harmony. "As Seneca lived with his Paulina, Abraham and Sara, Orpheus and Euridice, Arria and Poetus, Artemisia and Mausolus, Rubenius Celer that would needs have it ingraven on his tomb he had lived his life with Ennea, his dear wife, forty-three yeares, eight months, and never fell out As one holds, there's something in a woman beyond all human delight, a magnetique vertue, a charming quality, an occult and powerful motive. The husband rules her as head, but she again commands his heart, he is her servant, she his onely joy and content; no happiness is like unto it, no love so great as this of man and wife, no such comfort as *placens uxor*, a sweet wife, when they love at last as fresh as they did at first."

Thus this strange old pedant, from the depths of his recondite

learning, on the subject of love. But I confess I am more interested in the writer than even in what he writes. He gives us no formal account of himself; but there are bits of autobiography, glimpses of personal feeling, all the more charming for their rarity. He may sometimes pose as the impersonal scholar, the indifferent observer, the cold analyst; but do not believe it. He is a man and knows things human. Solitude? He has known solitude, but does not love it. "I have lived a silent, sedentary, solitary, private life." Melancholy? If he writes to cure melancholy, it is first of all his own. "I write of melancholy by being busie to avoid melancholy." "Concerning myself, I can peradventure affirm with Marius in Sallust, that which others hear or read of I felt and practised myself. They get their knowledge by books, I mine by melancholizing." Failure to get on in the world, all the more bitter because springing from conscious fault or error of one's own? "If it be not with me as I would, or as it should, I do ascribe the cause to mine own inelicity." "Had I done as others did, put myself forward, I might have haply been as great a man as many of my equals." Ah, that *had I done!* To write a huge folio to cure oneself of the pang of that!

And then this love. You think it ridiculous for me to meddle with it, a bachelor, a lonely scholar, a bookworm, an awkward oaf, perchance struck dumb at the sight of a fair lady, withered at the thought of kissing even a merry milkmaid. I agree. "I confess I am but a novice, a contemplator only, and what I say is merely reading, by mine own observation and other's relation." And yet—and yet—"I have a tincture, for why should I lye, dissemble, or excuse it? *Homo sum*, not altogether inexpert in this subject." I have drunk moonlight, and heard far-off pleasant songs on summer rivers, seen faces, too, that I—that I remember—that I never shall forget. Ah, well! Books are best. They are dusty and dreary and cold sometimes. But they never desert you or deceive you. Who was it among mine authors—I was reading him but yesterday, a Frenchman, I hate Frenchmen—who said, *Cette vie, l'ai-je vécue, l'ai-je rêvée?*

GAMALIEL BRADFORD, JR.

Wellesley Hills, Mass.